CHAPTER IX

OCCUPATIONS AND INCOME

(1) THE HISTORICAL BASES OF THE PECULIAB OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE JEWS

FOR historical reasons, everywhere the percentage of Jews engaged in agriculture is much smaller, and in commerce much larger, than that of non-Jews. Though among the Jews of ancient Palestine commerce and handicrafts were not unknown, agriculture formed their principal occupation. In Babylon, where they settled in the sixth century B.C., the position was reversed, many more engaging in commerce and handicrafts than in agriculture,[1] In Southern Europe, especially in Sicily and the South of France, in the first thousand years of the Christian era, there were still traces of a Jewish agriculture (mainly plantations of mulberry trees for the culture of silkworms, and vineyards), but commerce was already their main occupation. In Central and in Eastern Europe, where after the Crusades the Jews settled in considerable numbers, commerce, money business, and, somewhat later, handicrafts, became their sole occupations.

In the Diaspora the Jews could not freely steer their own economic course. They had to accept the

economic structure of the countries in which they settled, and to adapt themselves to it; and they were subject to the laws and arbitrary will of the master nations, which debarred them from many occupations. Nor did they find anywhere, in foreign countries, vacant cultivable land on which they could have settled—it was all taken up; and where it was

[1] Gt J. Newman, *The Agricultural Life of the Jews in Babylonia* (London, 1932).